RIBEYE 650 AND 785 ARMSTRONG

With their exclusive engine supply agreement with Yamaha, Ribeye have now become well established as a respected British RIB producer. Coupled to the Armstrong these RIBS are afforded even greater water-line length and fuel economy.

These British-designed, South African-built craft have earned themselves an enviable, deserved chunk of the UK and overseas RIB markets. Over the past few years the product has seen a series of changes and improvements, and the latest offering is proof that continuous development betters the breed. We have noticed that the craft appear more rigid and integrally stiffer than older versions, and the upholstery and overall finish are also noticeably improved over earlier craft; not that there was anything particularly amiss with the original RIBs, but there is clear evidence that Ribeye have a programme of steady development to ensure their products meet with the increasing demands of the ever more demanding public.

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The latest Ribeye 650 and 785 still sport the famous Peter Kidd-designed deep-V hulls that have proved so popular over the years as soft-riding sea-kindly designs, but as previously mentioned, these have been steadily improved with various tweaks, right up to the latest major change, the addition of the Armstrong transom extension brackets. The Armstrong bracket may not be familiar to many ribsters, but a brief explanation of the advantages that these add-on hull extensions bring will possibly help readers to understand the philosophy behind Ribeye's reason for offering them.

For many years in the USA, Armstrong have been leaders in designing and fitting their brackets to all types of craft, and the reason for their popularity is simple: because the engines are set further aft, they effectively increase a hull's waterline length, and because of this the engine runs in cleaner, less disturbed water, thus making them more efficient at high and medium speeds. Also, because the engines are set further back, increasing the length from bow to propeller, in rough seas the propeller stays in the water longer, providing better drive and seaworthiness. In the US, tests have shown some pretty impressive results, with increases in acceleration, top speed and, most importantly, up to a 29% improvement in fuel economy. Another advantage of the Armstrong bracket is its tremendous buoyancy, which helps lift the stern of the craft both when stationary and

accelerating; with the latest heavy 4-stroke outboard motors this is proving immensely advantageous, and looking at the Ribeyes with and without the bracket, the benefit is clear to see. Two more positives in the Armstrong/Ribeye argument are the spacious bathing platform that the bracket provides, and the reduction in engine noise.

So if these are the advantages, what are the disadvantages and why are other RIB manufacturers reluctant to fit the brackets as standard equipment? Well, here is my view on this. A RIB manufacturer who is designing a new hull from scratch knows they are going to rate the craft to a certain horsepower, so they design the craft from day one to accept the weight and power of that motor; adding a bracket later may be needed if the demand for a bigger and heavier motor is deemed necessary for a particular role, and the Armstrong bracket provides a simple and relatively inexpensive way of achieving this. On the other hand, if an existing established hull is particularly good at doing what it is meant to, but the demands of the end-user change and heavier motors are required, then the simple, practical and relatively inexpensive answer is to fit the bracket.

We have written on a number of occasions about the practical nature of the craft's layout, and the improved finish is immediately evident when stepping aboard. It is also quite noticeable how the craft is no longer squat under the not inconsiderable weight of the latest Yamaha 4-stroke outboards, particularly on the 785, with its mighty F250AETX (250hp) motor; and there is the practical incidental advantage that the bracket provides by way of a large bathing platform. The factory have not built a new deck mould to provide more interior space and place the rear bench seat further aft: instead they have retained the existing interior dimensions and

Custom flexibility options provided on all Ribeye models. Go and design your perfect setup!

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fitted a two-man multi-position 'bolster' bench seat/leaning post unit; these expensive American-manufactured seats are supposed to be the 'bees knees' in seating and there is no doubting their quality, but from my own experience I find them something of a compromise, offering neither the best seating comfort nor the best leaning post arrangement. Personally I would have preferred Ribeye's own very good jockey or bench seat arrangement for the driver and navigator positions, combined with the excellent and very comfortable bench seats that were fitted to these craft. One of the best things when buying a Ribeye is that there is a good choice of seating, and this allows a certain amount of flexibility with the interior layout.

So the Ribeye Armstrongs have an effectively greater waterline length without the manufacturers having to build new hull moulds, but how do Armstrong's claims stack up regarding improved performance and seakeeping? We took the latest Ribeye 650 and 785 Armstrong out in some pretty nasty conditions to find out.

Reversing into a choppy sea provided the first of a number of surprises in that no water splashed over the transom: the extra buoyancy of the bracket evidently kept the stern higher which in turn let the build-up of water pass beneath the bracket and flow harmlessly under the transom rather than over it. The second surprise was in the craft's attitude at sub-planing speeds: from tickover right through to planing speeds the craft now remained totally flat, making forward vision easier and providing quicker acceleration. Whether it was my imagination or not, in the prevailing strong winds and choppy seas of the test I expected to get soaked, yet we remained much drier than anticipated and certainly drier than on the last non-bracketed 785 model I piloted.

With dark threatening storm clouds careering across the sky, and with our heads ducked behind the console's windscreen to reduce the facial impact from the needle-like hailstones that now blasted us, we pushed out into the boiling Solent to find out if adding a bracket had really made a difference. It took no time at all to realise that these already capable hulls had just

RIBEYE 650 S SERIES F/W ARMSTRONG BRACKET

TECHNICAL DATA

Length overall: 6.60m
Width: 2.50m
Weight: 1250kg
Persons capacity: 12
Max HP: 200
Engine: Yamaha F150
Deadrise 'V' @ transom: 25.5
Tube diameter: 0.46m
Number of chambers: 5
Max load capacity: 1350kg
Tube material: Hypalon
CE category: B
Warranty: 5 years

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

- Sports console with front seat
- 2 x 2 man jockey seats
- Sculpted rear seat
- Fully rigged with Yamaha F150AETX

EXTRAS ON CRAFT

- A-frame with navigation lights
- 3-way bolster seat
- Teak decking
- iPod stereo
- LED deck lights
- Compass, VHF, and Garmin 4010
- 2 flag holders
- 2 fishing rod holders
- Fire extinguisher
- Anchor kit
- Mooring kit and mooring cover
- Bimini cover
- Armstrong bracket with boarding ladder

PRICES (INC VAT)

From: £34,199
As tested: £48,355

MANUFACTURER - UK DISTRIBUTOR

Ribeye Ltd
Collingwood Road, Townstal Industrial Estate, Dartmouth, Devon TQ6 9JY
Tel: 01803 832060
www.ribeye.co.uk

RIBEYE 785 S SERIES F/W ARMSTRONG BRACKET

TECHNICAL DATA

Length overall: 7.85m
Width: 2.50m
Weight: 1400kg
Persons capacity: 14
Max HP: 250
Engine: Yamaha F250
Deadrise 'V' @ transom: 25.5
Tube diameter: 0.46m
Number of chambers: 5
Max load capacity: 1500kg
Tube material: Hypalon
CE category: B
Warranty: 5 years

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

- Sports console with front seat
- 2 x 2 man jockey seats
- Sculpted rear seat
- Fully rigged with Yamaha F250AETX

EXTRAS ON CRAFT

- A-frame with navigation lights
- 3-way bolster seat
- Teak decking and LED deck lights
- iPod stereo
- Compass, VHF, and Garmin 4008
- Mooring cover
- Armstrong bracket with boarding ladder

PRICES (INC VAT)

From: £41,129
As tested: £59,454

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Tel: 01803 832060
www.ribeye.co.uk

benefitted way beyond what one might have thought possible simply by fitting an extension bracket for the motor. Heading into, away or sideways on to the waves, both RIBs rode like a much bigger craft and handled the awkward seas without flinching, the extra length keeping the propeller driving the craft forwards without allowing the engines to 'bark' every time a large wave was encountered. Having the engine set further aft and therefore in constant contact with the water has also provided better all-round control and, most importantly, a much more progressive and smoother ride than that of previously tested pre-Armstrong Ribeyes.

To sum up, by the simple addition of well-designed marine-grade aluminium Armstrong outboard extension brackets, Ribeye have transformed two already well-sorted desirable RIBs into much improved handling craft, to the extent that on the water it is hard to comprehend that the only difference is the bracket. So good now is the handling of these craft that it is as if they are from a completely different stable, yet we know it is only the bracket that has made the difference. Based on our test experience and the improved performance/economy figures given by Armstrong, it is little wonder that Ribeye are considering fitting the bracket as standard equipment on all future 650/785 models, but they had best make the most of the situation, for I can see other RIB builders quickly following suit and beating a path to Armstrong's door.

Paul Lemmer

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NB: Due to the weather conditions it was not possible to carry out performance testing.